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**Immigration Opportunity or Organizational
Oxymoron? The Canadian Jewish Farm School and
the Department of Immigration, 1925-46**

Examining uniquely dramatic historical narratives often illuminates the much more complex web of issues surrounding them. For example the stories of the *Komagata Maru* and *St. Louis* incidents speak volumes about key questions in Canadian immigration history. But less dramatic narratives also serve to illuminate the intricacies of interwar Canadian immigration policy towards Jews. The strange tale of the Canadian Jewish Farm School (CJFS) of Georgetown, Ontario yields fascinating insights into the relationship between Canadian Jews, the Department of Immigration, and Frederick Blair that further illuminates the work of previous historians. It also adds to our knowledge of the intra-Jewish squabbles over immigration strategies and tactics taking place between the wars, and the extent to which these affected Departmental policy.

Jewish Torontonians first heard of the CJFS in early 1925 when 400 people attended a mass fundraising meeting at a local synagogue.¹ At first blush, the event seemed strangely out of touch with the 1920s Toronto Jewish scene. Jews were city dwellers. There were less than 100 Jewish farmers in Ontario even according to the most optimistic estimates. How then to explain what attracted so many to the launch of new organization intending to organize and educate the Jewish farmers of Ontario? Some attended out of sheer curiosity: were there actually Jewish farmers in Ontario? Certainly the existence of Jewish farm colonies in Western Canada was well known to Toronto Jews, but they found it difficult to believe Ontario's vast swathes of farmland contained any Jewish farmers. And even if there were 150 Jewish farmers in Ontario, as organizer Morris Saxe claimed, how could this miniscule population justify a public fund raising meeting backed by some of Toronto Jewry's key movers and shakers? The answer was simple: Jewish Farmers' of Ontario founder Morris Saxe. His unique biography and interests launched an immigration endeavour that touched on "hot button" issues of interwar Canadian Jews: concern over Canada's narrowing gates, constructing an authentic identity, and a belief that Jewish organizational representations to government could ease anti-Semitism. The difficulties Saxe encountered mirrored communal chasms over these issues. Therefore Saxe's commercial and communal careers provide a useful and atypical glimpse into his generation's key concerns.

Saxe's unusual upbringing foreshadowed his iconoclastic career. Not only was Saxe a trained farmer when he immigrated, but his parents had been trained to farm on a Jewish agricultural colony near Odessa in the 1870s. Unlike most Jewish immigrants, the 23 year old Saxe spent his first few months of 1902 in Ontario scouting farmland similar to where he had grown up. His European experiences convinced him that Jewish farmers could succeed by using modern technology and sound business practices. Saxe was an entrepreneur to the core, a believer in proper agrarian education, familiarity with the land, and the doctrine of hard work. He believed that, with proper training, every Jew could emulate his success and became a tireless advocate for educating Jews about the benefits of farm life.

This belief in agricultural education led Saxe to the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph but his poor English deterred him from completing any courses. This proved to be an opportunity for Saxe to learn about Ontario farming techniques and soil conditions (and a good deal of English) serving as a hired hand in the Acton and Georgetown area. By 1914 his English was fluent enough for him to serve the RCMP as an interpreter for enemy alien interrogations. Patriotism proven, he wasted no time putting down deep roots in his new homeland. After marrying his childhood sweetheart, Saxe purchased land near Georgetown, and soon the farm was thriving. He returned to Ontario Agricultural College and completed courses in dairy farm management and milk production, leveraging this knowledge to establish modern creameries in Georgetown and Acton. He was a canny businessman, purchasing well placed downtown lots in both towns on which he built movie theatres. A larger than life figure in personality, persistence, and physique, Saxe earned universal respect.²

Only one year after Saxe immigrated, Frederick Charles Blair began his forty year career as an immigration department bureaucrat. Like Saxe, Blair rose quickly through the ranks through hard work and attention to detail. Beginning as a mere customs inspector, by 1924 he had been appointed Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration. Blair had little use for Jewish immigrants. He claimed his anti-Jewish animus was based on "facts" rather than anti-Semitism, contending that Jewish immigrants often did not comply with a web of arcane regulations, most of which he had drafted with explicit purpose of making Jewish immigration to Canada all but impossible. Blair reserved a special level of scrutiny and scorn for Jews who claimed to be farmers. He believed that Jews were innately urban dwellers and those who claimed to be farmers falsely sought to take advantage of Canada's preferential regulations for agriculturalists. Certainly the behaviour of some Canadian Jews and prospective immigrants supported Blair's opinion.³

Saxe may not have known the minutiae of Blair's web of regulations; the straightforward and increasingly prosperous entrepreneur simply wanted to help organize other Jewish farmers and persuade other Jews to join them. He was a "back to the land" advocate who believed (as he wrote later to Blair of all people) that "the time has arrived for the Jews of Canada to give up peddling, jobbing, etc. [sic] and take up farming, and if we can not succeed with the ones already here, then the newcomers must be agriculturalists."⁴ By mid-1925 he had formed the Federated Jewish Farmers of Ontario (FJFO) and was seeking to raise funds to establish a CJFS that would train Jewish farmers.

Saxe's vision and excellent agrarian credentials attracted considerable interest from the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada. (JIAS) The Society, founded in 1919, had negotiated an informal annual quota of Jewish immigrants with the Immigration Department by 1924. JIAS' Toronto Office, loosely overseen by the Montreal headquarters, was run by a Board that combined Uptowners from the Holy Blossom

Temple with Downtowners from the *Yiddishe Zhurnal*. Sensing an opportunity to gain more influence over immigration, JIAS' 1925 Annual Meeting commended the newly chartered FJFO and resolved that "a plan of ... establishing a training farm for the purposes of training Jews for agricultural work deserves our consideration and full support."⁵ Not a little of this support came from the ulterior motives of some of its Toronto Board members who saw the proposed CJFS as both a way to bring in friends and relatives and enrich themselves in the process. Ostensibly JIAS was against "immigration fixers" but many remained on the Toronto and Montreal Boards until an organizational house cleaning in 1927.⁶

On May 24, 1925, one week after the JIAS Annual Meeting, Saxe stood in front of a crowd of 400 at the McCaul Street Synagogue to formally begin his campaign to raise the funds to establish the Jewish CJFS. He was still unaware of both of Blair's web of regulations and the internal dynamics of the JIAS Board. The idealistic agrarian could not have known and would never understand that many in the Jewish community saw his proposed CJFS as an ingenious way of getting into Canada and would be shocked to hear he had no idea of circumventing immigration regulations despite their decidedly anti-Semitic complexion. Saxe learned quickly; within a year he reported that "we sent 12 [permits] back because we found they were not genuine cases of men who wanted to farm." The tragic irony of Saxe's idealism would estrange him from most of the organized Jewish community while making him one of the few Jews esteemed by Frederick Blair.⁷

Gaining the dubious distinction of being in Blair's esteem was no easy matter for a Jew. Frederick Blair dead set against Jewish immigration. By mid-1925 the Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration was convinced that there were too many Jews in Canada, particularly because they overflowed Canada's urban areas and shunned rural living. Blair believed, despite the evidence of some successful Jewish farm colonies in the Western provinces, that any prospective Jewish immigrant who applied as an agriculturalist was simply lying in an effort to join their coreligionists. By now Blair thought he knew all about the Jews and their tricks. As far as he was concerned, it would be best if they didn't come to Canada—it would only increase anti-Semitism.

That Blair was an anti-Semite is beyond doubt; indeed his zealous stereotyping of Jews as non-agriculturalists even when there was incontrovertible evidence to the contrary would cost Canada many valuable immigrants who could well have added to farm technology and breeding techniques. Blair's implacable antipathy to Jewish immigration combined with his workaholic nature and mastery of minutiae to make him the perfect point man, as Abella and Troper have shown, for Mackenzie King's exclusionist policies. Reading Blair's lengthy memos and copious minutes, one wonders: was there a chink in Blair's armour? Did he ever see Jews as individuals rather than stereotypes? Did his almost paranoid antipathy to Jewish farmers have a factual basis? Saxe's quest to gain bureaucratic approval of his CJFS scheme sheds

some interesting light on these questions because his impeccable local reputation gained him direct access to Ontario's Minister of Agriculture J.M. Martin, who was impressed both by Saxe and his plans.⁸

Martin immediately wrote to Deputy Immigration Minister Egan asking "if the Department would look favourably on an interesting scheme brought forward by a delegation from the Federated Jewish Farmers of Ontario." Egan shunted the letter off to Blair for a draft reply. By this time the Saxe-inspired organization, barely a year old, had accomplished a great deal. A Dominion charter was promptly secured, followed by a quick succession of public meetings in Toronto and Montreal, featuring endorsements from across the Jewish community and support from the United Farmers of Ontario, soon raised over \$30,000. The funds were quickly put to good use: 200 acres of prime farmland was purchased near Georgetown Ontario for \$14,000 and 200 adjacent acres were leased with a \$13,000 option to purchase. After some quick construction work, 15 young Jewish men, mostly recent immigrants, enrolled in the CJFS course. It was hoped that after a season of training they would then be able to work with other farmers or acquire their own farms.⁹

Given this record, and Blair's obsessive scrutiny of the community, it is not surprising that he recognized Saxe's name and admitted to his virtues as "a practical man." But of course Blair's expertise saw through Saxe's apparent subterfuge, and he advised his boss to simply reject the Federated Jewish Farmers request "as a scheme for bringing more Jewish immigrants into Canada who would not otherwise be admissible," (Blair to Egan, June 9, 1926). If Canadian Jews wanted a CJFS, it was not a matter for the Immigration Department—let them recruit Jews already in Canada. Egan duly responded along these lines to the Ontario Minister of Agriculture and that should have ended the matter.¹⁰

But Saxe was one of those Jews who Blair characterized as "believing that no means maybe." His persistence paralleled that of many frustrated Canadian Jews desperately seeking to reunite their families by finding ways through the Department's exclusionist labyrinth. Saxe barraged Egan with letters and eventually secured a personal interview, reviewing the FJFO's work and asked that 12 immigrants be admitted specifically as workers for the CJFS. Saxe was even more compelling in person, and his high-level political support, the fact that considerable funds were already invested in a working farm, and the minority status of the Liberals, proved decisive. In early October 1925 Egan agreed to issue 12 permits, scrawling "Approved—find a way to do it" over yet another Blair missive counselling continued refusal.¹¹

So began Saxe's introduction to the realities of the Canadian Jewish immigration game. A single ad in the Jewish press garnered 200 applicants for the 12 visas for immigrants supposedly eager to learn farming. A businessman knew 12 men in Cuba who would be eager to immigrate, and when Saxe hesitated, he was offered hun-

dreds of dollars to assist him in making a quick decision on where to allocate his precious quota of permits. J.J. Glass, Secretary of the CJFS, wrote directly to Blair requesting that the permits be sent to immigrants he had selected—actually clients who had paid \$400 each and agreed to be students at the CJFS until they could leave and join relatives in Toronto. Saxe discovered this situation through an angry Blair missive in early 1926. This marked Saxe's wake up call to the often murky world the government had created with its introduction of the permit system in 1923. In response, desperate Canadian Jews turned to a host of "fixers" and "middle men" who claimed special influence at obtaining permits. Another alternative was the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society. This non-profit orphan child of the First Canadian Jewish Congress of 1919 which ignominiously collapsed was generally believed to be a better bet than steamship agents because it received permits directly from Ottawa. JIAS' 1925 quota of 1,500 permits was bestowed for weeding out the weak applications, leaving the Department of Immigration with easier gate-keeping. JIAS was being paid for doing Ottawa's immigration triage work. And dirty work it was. It was no pleasure to talk to enraged clients whose relatives were languishing in Europe, but the reward was worth it. Customers were attracted by JIAS' fee structure; if a permit came through JIAS' fee was far lower than the \$300.00 generally charged by the steamship agents. Lawyers often charged an even higher fee. Some MPs in "Jewish ridings" would also appeal directly to Immigration for a fee and a history of loyalty to the Liberal party.¹²

Given these circumstances, these 12 permits suddenly made Saxe a "player in the immigration permit market. He soon discovered that some of his supporters had also intended to profit from their association with the CJFS. The FJFO Secretary, up and coming lawyer J.J. Glass, went behind Saxe's back and wrote directly to the Immigration Branch requesting some of the permit quota for his clients. The ever vigilant Blair replied that one of the men "was already known to us from a previous application and did not state at that time that he was a farmer." Saxe discovered Glass' letter through Blair's reply, which threatened to leave the CJFS stillborn. Saxe's response was biting and blunt: After revealing "that I have dealt with over 200 applications and recommended none," Saxe then bitterly complained that JIAS and other Jewish organizations had turned against him and labelled him anti-immigrant. And with good reason. After failing to persuade a Rabbi to join the CJFS Executive, Saxe informed him that "if all the Jewish people had been city dwellers, they never would have received the "Law of Moses". He, a Rabbi should know that to be a good Jew he must be a farmer." And to make it abundantly clear where he stood, Saxe then continued: "the time has arrived for the Jews in Canada to give up peddling, jobbing, etc. and take up farming, and if we can not succeed with the ones already here, then the newcomers must be agriculturalists."¹³

By mid-1926, Saxe's outspokenness led to a mass exodus from the FJFO Executive and Board. One man left because Saxe revoked and returned the permit for his

nephew when it was discovered he was a tailor rather than a farmer. Some of those who resigned were immigration agents who now realized that they could not make money with Saxe as gatekeeper. Some of these men organized rival farm colonization companies and advertised heavily in the Jewish press while disparaging the FJFO publically as an “anti-immigrant organization.” They also complained to Blair, substantiating their claims through affidavits. But Saxe, who by now was running the FJFO almost singlehandedly, rounded up affidavits from local farmers, the local Progressive MP candidate, and the sympathetic ear of Immigration Minister Robert Forke. Most importantly, Saxe was fully supported by Blair, who found Saxe’s responses to his fellow Jews music to his ears. Blair bluntly informed Saxe’s accusers that “I have some facts in connection with the other side of this story” and denied all their claims. As if this were not enough, he then wrote Saxe: “There came to me an appreciation of how clearly you were carrying on with your organization along the lines set down when you introduced ... the Federated Jewish Farmers of Ontario ... I realize more than words can convey your endeavour, which I know means pioneer work of a very special kind.”¹⁴

This type of “pioneer work” required arduous attention to detail, close supervision, and increasingly large amounts of Saxe’s funds. But it was yielding dividends. Three of the first group on the farm, young men who had lived in Canada for some years before turning to farming, purchased farms in the area. A couple of other found work as farm hands in the region. The others continued to work on the farm, receiving a stipend now that they had “graduated” from the program. By early 1927, fifteen “graduates” of the CJFS were actively involved in farming. This considerable achievement also meant that Saxe needed more men for the farm, and given his strict criteria, they were not easily obtainable. The farm was large enough to accommodate 50 men, he advised Blair’s superior, and he hoped the Department would comply. Of course, the letter was shunted to Blair, who immediately advised that “I would go as far as possible in encouraging this movement,” significant adding “we may never have another so good a chance to demonstrate our support for Jewish land settlement.”¹⁵

Blair’s unprecedented support was based on Saxe’s willingness to play gatekeeper. Indeed, only 6 of the first 13 permits received passed muster. Saxe’s position now roughly paralleled that of JIAS which received an annual quota of immigrants in return for closely vetting applications. But unlike JIAS, who had far more applicants than needed, Saxe’s CJFS languished despite its excellent facilities because there was little interest among native born Canadian Jews or prospective immigrants becoming agriculturalists. Despite an advertising campaign in Yiddish and English that emphasized that after a year of training at the CJFS, graduates would be able to independently farm on their own and get involved in a profitable industry “in which many farmers retired by 60,” Saxe found little interest from native born Canadian Jews, and he rejected the vast majority of European applicants as unsuitable for ag-

riculture or motivated by the sole desire to evade the immigration regulations. It was therefore easy and quite correct for Saxe's growing list of opponents to paint him as 'anti-immigrant' in the Jewish press, especially when their own schemes for Jewish agricultural immigration were thwarted. The publicity war intensified in late 1926 when JIAS was informed that it would no longer receive a quota in 1927. JIAS promptly ran large ads in the Toronto and Montreal Yiddish papers that wrongly accused Saxe and the CJFS of colluding to deny JIAS its quota renewal and helping to close Canada's gates to Jewish immigrants.¹⁶

JIAS' attitude was not without foundation. After the quota loss was announced in both English and Yiddish newspapers, Saxe told JIAS National Secretary Levine that "if you had been given the quota for 1927, and all these people had come in, they no doubt would have followed the same pursuits as they did in former days, you would have increased in Canada the number of pedlars, traders and job hunters, and you know ... that this country is overrun with this class of people." Certainly the JIAS Executive could not be blamed for seeing more than a passing resemblance between Saxe's language and Blair's, coincident with the quota's demise.¹⁷

But, though his opponents chose to ignore it, Saxe's adamant stance and belief in the inherent value of Jewish agricultural settlement was based on deep principles. He recalled that at the height of JIAS' ad campaign against the CJFS, Abraham Rhine-whine, publisher of the Toronto *Yiddishe Zhurnal* approached him with a "business proposition." If Saxe would obtain permits for Rhinewhine's married brother and family, he would be paid \$300 and receive "enough publicity to really put the CJFS on the map." Predictably, Saxe was not interested in bringing in people who could not farm. This also cost him many friendships, as he steadfastly refused to even attempt to get permits for friends' relatives.¹⁸

But in early 1927, just as it appeared that the CJFS had little chance of ever attracting enough prospective farmers, Saxe received an urgent telegram from the International Colonization Association, the coordinating agency for Jewish emigration from Europe. Ely Greenberg, who operated a Jewish orphanage in Mezritch, Poland, wanted some of his young charges to immigrate to America for a new lease on life. But this would prove impossible, for the Polish quota was filled for 1927 and well into the future. Perhaps Saxe could settle the orphans on the CJFS, train them as farmers, and they could then settle in Canada? Saxe saw this as a golden opportunity to fill the CJFS for a considerable number of years. But it would also entail considerable investment: a full kitchen and extensive dormitory would have to be built from scratch and more equipment would need to be ordered. Saxe's funds were dwindling and he did not believe he could undertake the expense.¹⁹

Greenberg proved charming and obliging. After showing Saxe photographs of the Polish orphanage he had run since 1920, he offered to repay the remaining \$7,000

CJFS debt and to erect a new dormitory with full kitchen facilities at his own expense. Saxe was no fool, and made inquiries about Greenblatt. There was no cause for concern. The Detroit native was well thought of by the Joint Distribution Committee, an American Jewish group that worked in Eastern Europe to alleviate Jewish poverty, and Greenblatt had farm experience in Connecticut. He was reputed to be well off and well able to entice other “high types of citizens” to financially support his work. After hearing these glowing reports, Saxe told Egan and Blair everything, asked for the Immigration Department’s support, and assured them that “the CJFS [will] accept full responsibility for these children after their arrival in Canada.”²⁰

Saxe’s stock with the Department was such that within ten days he and Ely Greenblatt had been interviewed by Blair and Egan in Ottawa, and the orphans’ immigration was approved—this at a time when other Canadian Jews waited months for the Department to reply to a simple inquiry. The Department agreed to admit “approximately 50 Polish orphans ranging in age from 10 to 17 years.” Assuming they passed the mandatory medical check (Blair even offered that, provided the School paid the travelling costs, the Canadian medical officer would come to the orphanage), it was the CJFS’ responsibility to train them for at least a year and then ensure that the orphans went into farm work and did not drift into the cities. If any left the School, Saxe was to immediately notify the department. Saxe was delighted; here was an opportunity to finally justify his idealistic beliefs about Jewish agrarian settlement while saving orphans from the deprivations and anti-Semitism of Poland.²¹

With the Department of Immigration onboard and Greenberg’s cash infusion, construction on the new facilities at the CJFS moved forward quickly. Somehow Saxe found time to correspond ceaselessly and keep the operation moving while still running his creameries and other properties. By now Saxe was running the day to day operations of both the CJFS and FJFO singlehandedly; his businesses thrived because he left them in the hands of honest managers. Nonetheless, financial and personal strains were beginning to show. His family complained about his frequent absences, and became concerned when Saxe began to defray the School’s expenses with his own funds. But Saxe’s idealism often obscured his business sense and family life, especially as the Polish orphan venture developed through 1927 and 1928.

In June 1927, 38 children accompanied by their teacher and two female supervisors arrived at the CJFS. Soon they were all working on the farm in the morning, and were taught English in the afternoons by the Principal of the local public school. A choir was formed, and Greenberg arranged for it to tour Toronto, Detroit, Montreal, and even Carnegie Hall in New York, publicizing the CJFS and raising funds. Blair was quick to ensure that the Immigration Department issued permits for these brief forays into the United States, and his correspondence with Saxe became increasingly friendly and personal. But tensions were brewing. By late 1928, after the students had completed their training, it proved difficult to place them as farm workers There

were relatively few Jewish farmers, and most of them had large families who doubled as farm help. These children could not be placed with non-Jewish farmers, even though there was considerable demand for farm workers—Saxe had 12 requests in the summer of 1928 alone. When consulted, Blair suggested that it was vital for Saxe to move “to the next stage of colonization” by creating a Jewish agricultural colony in the area. This was impossible given that the Jewish community’s support for the CJFS had waned after it became clear that it was not simply a roundabout way to secure admission to Canada.²²

By early 1929 at least one-quarter of the students were drifting off to Toronto and other cities. All the girls were placed as domestics in Jewish homes, which the Department agreed to after it was evident that no other placement would materialize. JIAS heard of Saxe’s problems and offered to take over the school and turn it into a receiving centre for Jewish boys from Poland. JIAS proposed that the government offer an annual quota of 50 to 100 young men. Saxe was concerned that these men would move straight to the city and ceding control to JIAS was anathema. He told Blair that he would like to bring in one more group of orphans because they were more likely to remain farmers. Clearly Saxe was now so emotionally involved that his business sense was impaired. He admitted that the CJFS was 7,000 in debt and that Greenberg’s financial support was drying up.²³

By now, the Department was having doubts about Greenberg’s honesty. At the end of their initial meeting with Saxe and Greenberg in 1927, Blair and his colleague Mr. Fraser asked if the prospective immigrants were “true orphans.” Greenberg replied that “their mothers are dead or as good as dead.” Fraser was very upset by this and ran after Greenberg and stopped him just as he was about to enter the elevator to try to catch the afternoon train to Montreal. Fraser and Blair asked again if both parents were dead, and Greenberg now replied that all the orphans had no parents and Saxe seconded him and insisted that he would never accept a child whose parents remained alive. With that, both men stepped into the elevator. But this slip—if that is what it was—upset Fraser because he felt deceived; the regulations defined an orphan as a child under 18 who had no parents. But this did not mean that Greenberg was lying; Jewish tradition does not distinguish between a “half orphan” and a “complete orphan.” In fact, many children in Toronto’s Jewish Children’s Home were “half orphans” whose working widower fathers had placed them there because they could not take care of them. Unfortunately, the Immigration Department’s officials were not much interested in cultural relativism; Fraser was suspicious of Greenberg and, perhaps unreasonably, kept his antennae out for more information.

He didn’t have long to wait. Two of the boys who left the CJFS were picked up by American relatives who attempted to bring them into the United States. Rumour had it that this was pre-arranged by Greenberg who was receiving \$400 per orphan. The Immigration Department carried out an undercover investigation in De-

troit which, while it did not conclusively confirm the rumours, did indicate that the leaders of Detroit Jewry did not hold Greenberg in much esteem. The Department took the position that his interest in the CJFS was suspicious, and that he was using the School as a backdoor conduit to the United States. Saxe came to believe that Greenberg actively counselled the orphans to practice deception and maintained this opinion until his death despite the American's considerable investment in the School. Greenberg's record remains a moot point, despite considerable circumstantial evidence of his complicity; certainly the Department's investigation heightened Saxe's tensions which were already at breaking point through the combination of the lack of communal support, his mounting debts, and the difficulty of placing his graduates. His marriage began to suffer when his wife was pressed into service after the cook left and no replacement could be secured. Saxe would subsequently blame himself for her early death.²⁴

The Immigration Department's belief in Saxe's honesty and commitment to the CJFS remained the silver lining in the gathering clouds. In early 1929, despite the pressures he faced, Saxe asked Ottawa if a second group of orphans could be admitted. He was caught in an impossible bind. Without any orphans to till the land, milk the cows, and harvest the produce, the entire \$50,000 venture would vanish; but continued reliance on Greenberg was a risky business. Saxe briefly investigated other Jewish orphanages in Poland, but quickly realized that he did not have the time to build a relationship with them. Despite Blair's concerns over these issues, which led to Saxe briefly resigning as CJFS President, the admission of a second group of orphans was approved in 1929. Blair still believed that "on the whole the [CJFS] effort has been a genuine one" and 28 more orphans arrived in June 1929.²⁵

Trouble began quickly. It soon became evident that Greenberg had coached the orphans not to talk to Saxe. Five of them immediately refused to work and demanded to be allowed to go off to their American relatives. One revealed that he was 21 and married rather than 18 and single. Many others in this group worked in a half-hearted manner. In April 1930 Saxe threw in the towel and resigned as President. The orphans gradually dispersed, the majority settling successfully in Canada without being penalized with deportation. Even Blair did not blame Saxe for this chain of events, noting that he "and a few of his followers were the only Jewish people interested in using the school to promote Jewish agricultural life in Canada." As the Depression stifled economic growth, Saxe was forced to seek protection under the Farmers' Creditors Act, and the School property was sold, but the charter was retained. Saxe still retained his hope of Jewish agricultural settlement. He continued a very friendly correspondence with Blair well into the 1930's, always hoping to somehow reopen the CJFS. His idealism would meet a sad end.²⁶

Immediately after World War Two ended with revelations of the Holocaust's immensity, Saxe tried once again to restart the CJFS. On May 1, 1946, just as Prime Min-

ister King was introducing a new Citizenship Act, Saxe proposed the resuscitation of the CJFS. He reminded the Immigration Department that a considerable number of his graduates had become local farmers or farm workers. Some had fought in the Canadian forces; two had been wounded and one killed. In addition, the Holocaust had significantly changed the Toronto Jewish political landscape and there was widespread agreement among that the CJFS was a worthy destination for Holocaust survivors. The School already had raised \$25,000 and placed an option on three large properties in the Georgetown area. A fundraising campaign spearheaded by a key Executive member of Toronto's United Jewish Welfare Fund was ready to roll. When no answer came by October, Saxe led a delegation—including Mr. Goldfarb, an orphan who had done well in the interim—to Ottawa. Arthur Jolliffe, Blair's successor, listened carefully and promised a decision within 10 days.²⁷

Jolliffe took the matter up with the Minister of Immigration, who decided to refuse the application. On October 28, Jolliffe informed Saxe of this decision. The heartbroken committee heard the letter read aloud and "could not believe that your Department would turn down such a human appeal." One of the delegation recalled "feeling defeated and that anti-Semitism was government policy in Ottawa." Stunned that his new homeland, in which he had prospered, turned a deaf ear to his pleas left Saxe broken and bitter. He carried this bitterness with him to the grave, believing that his idealistic plans were "sabotaged by politicians and others with their own agendas." He took pains to ensure that the documentation of "his side" of the story was preserved for posterity.²⁸

To simply damn Saxe with faint praise by portraying him as the saviour of sixty-five orphans from the Holocaust victimized by his own naive idealism misses some key issues in the CJFS' short but complex history. The evidence fully supports Saxe's charges that Canadian Jews at all levels had no interest in supporting Jewish agricultural endeavours in Canada in the 1920's. Canadian Jews paid lip service to the "proud history" of Jewish farm colonies in the Prairies; they happily filled thousands of "little blue boxes" for the Jewish National Fund to support Jewish colonization efforts in Palestine—but they wanted their children to become factory owners, dentists, doctors, lawyers, and architects. The disinterest of Canadian Jews in supporting the CJFS through donations of money or actually signing up to farm starkly contrasts with soaring Jewish participation in universities at the undergraduate and professional levels. The ideal of "back to the land" only applied to Palestine by the 1920's.

Frederick Blair saw this all too clearly and correctly. His anti-Semitism did not blind him to Saxe's unique qualifications and idealism. Surely he revealed in Saxe's diatribes against his co-religionists, certainly he enjoyed the inside stories of intra-ethnic mudslinging, and even found time to complain "see how the Jews desecrate the Sabbath" about a Sunday fundraising meeting for the CJFS. Nonetheless, Blair also went out on a bureaucratic limb to support Saxe's efforts. Not only did he acknowl-

edge the uniqueness of Saxe's idealism and knowledge of farming but, most tellingly, Blair permitted a second group of orphans to immigrate even when considerable evidence suggested that Greenberg was meddling and that Saxe's own financial house was in precarious shape. Long after the dust had settled, Blair praised Saxe for his honest efforts and his successors in the Department echoed his stance.²⁹

It is quite possible the CJFS narrative helps explain Blair's later antipathy to Jewish communal efforts to bring Sudeten Jewish farmers into Canada in 1938–39. This group, along with some German dairy farmers, had impeccable agrarian pedigrees and some possessed considerable capital which would have made them among the few Jews admissible under the immigration regulation of the time. But Blair was convinced that most, if not all, of them were lying. Some of those who were admitted did drastic things to convince Canadian consular officials of their veracity. One family literally drove a Canadian diplomat from Vienna to their Czech estate and showed him around before he would agree to apply for their admission. They left on the last flight out of Prague before the German takeover. At the very least, the CJFS story gave credence to Blair's prejudices.³⁰

The attitude of Canadian Jews to agricultural pursuits is also changing. The recent rise of Shores, a Jewish agricultural cooperative that has acquired a farm near Guelph to turn young, university educated Jews into farmers, is a testimony to the rebirth of a modern North American Jewish "back to the land" movement that integrates agrarianism and a deep vein of Jewish spirituality based on Biblical texts. A 2014 Shores Convention report told of "professional parents"—doctors, lawyers, accountants, and the like, "coming to terms" with their children who choosing this new Jewish agrarianism over "typical" Jewish career paths. It would have made Saxe smile with pioneering pride.³¹

1
Aaron D. Hart, *The Jew in Canada: A Complete Record of Canadian Jewry From the Days of the French Regime to the Present Time* (Toronto and Montreal: Jewish Publications Limited, 1926), 489.

2
David Fleishman, "Man of Conscience Binder," (David Fleishman's Private Collection). David Fleishman, an architect and film producer, is Saxe's grandson. In 1996 he researched a documentary on his grandfather's work, called "Man of Conscience." The documentary is now available on Youtube.com. I thank David for sharing his research notes and the voluminous file of correspondence between his grandfather, the Department of Immigration, and others, that a researcher culled from the Immigration Depart-

ment files at the Public Archives of Canada. All the correspondence comes from these "Saxe Papers." Without Mr. Fleishman's knowledge and interest in his grandfather's legacy, this article could not have been written.

3
Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (New York: Random House, 1983), 7-9.

4
Morris Saxe, letter to Frederick Blair, February 15, 1926, Saxe Papers.

5
Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, 489.

6

Jack Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will: An Organizational History of Jewish Toronto, 1933-1948* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 83-86.

7

Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, 489; Morris Saxe to Frederick Blair, January 14, 1927.

8

Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, 7-9.

9

Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, 489; J. M. Martin, letter to W. J. Egan, June 4, 1926, Saxe Papers; Egan to Martin, June 9, 1926; Blair to Egan, June 9, 1926.

10

Egan to Martin, June 9, 1926.

11

Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, 9; Blair to Egan, August 21 and September 9, 1926, minute by Egan on latter.

12

On the entire era, see Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998), 49-58, provides an excellent background to the events in this article.

13

Saxe to Blair, February 15, 1926; Blair to Egan, February 14, 1926; Blair to Saxe, February 16, 1926.

14

Blair to Fraser, February 27, 1927; "The Canadian Jewish Farm School" (pamphlet in English and Yiddish) (David Fleishman private collection); Saxe to Blair, September 10, 1926; Saxe to Blair, October 5, 1926; Morrison to Robert Forke, October 1926; Saxe to Egan, October 20, 1926; Taylor to Forke, November 2, 1926; Birman to Forke, November 9, 1926; Blair to Birman, November 15, 1926.

15

Saxe to Blair, March 15, 1927; Blair's minute on Saxe to Fraser, May 27, 1926

16

"The Canadian Jewish Farm School" (pamphlet in David Fleishman private collection); Saxe to Levine, December 20, 1926; Saxe

to Egan, December 23, 1926; Saxe to Blair, January 14, 1927.

17

Saxe to Levine, December 20, 1926.

18

Saxe to Abraham Rhinewhine, April 4, 30.

19

Saxe to Egan and Blair, March 15, 1927.

20

Ibid.

21

Saxe to Egan and Blair, March 15, 1927.

22

Walker to Saxe, Egan, and Blair, June 17, 1927; Saxe to Blair, October 26, 1927; Saxe to Blair, January 9, 1928.

23

Blair to Saxe, October 29, 1928; Saxe to Blair, November 2, 1928; Blair Memorandum to File, February 26, 1929; Adams to Blair, April 6, 1929.

24

Ibid; Ben Kayfetz, "Growing Up on Dundas Street," in *Growing up Jewish: Canadians Tell Their Own Stories*, eds. Rosalie Sharp et al. (Toronto: McClland & Stewart, 1997), 65.

25

Blair to Jolliffe, October 30, 1943.

26

Ibid; the men became so close that when Saxe's wife passed away, their son wrote to Blair, who wrote a heartfelt reply in which he spoke of his own wife's recent death. See Percy Saxe to Blair, June 10, 1935; Blair to Saxe, June 13, 1935; Saxe to Blair, December 2, 1935.

27

Saxe to Jolliffe, May 1, 1946; Jolliffe Memo to File, October 15, 1946.

28

Jolliffe Memo to File, October 15, 1946; Martin Goldfarb, "One Foot in the Old World," in *Growing up Jewish: Canadians Tell Their Own Stories*, eds. Rosalie Sharp et al. (Toronto: McClland & Stewart, 1997), 8; Jolliffe to Saxe, 25 October 1946

29

Blair to Egan, September 14, 1925.

30

Abeles, interview by Jack Lipinsky, July 4, 2013.

31

Andrea Most and Jack Lipinsky, "Jewish Farmers of Ontario" (paper presented at the Shoresh Food Conference, Toronto, Ontario, February 2, 2014).